

# Push begins for 100% renewable energy



A press conference in Greenfield was seen as a way to promote locally rooted projects to help address climate change while boosting local economies. METROCREATIVE IMAGE

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Responding to what they see as “an all-out assault on our environment by the Trump administration” — as well as some disappointment over the state’s comprehensive energy legislation last year — a coalition of green-energy advocates launched an effort calling for Massachusetts communities to commit to 100 percent renewable energy while pressing to get all its energy, for vehicles, heating as well as power, from sources like wind and solar.

A press conference in Greenfield, along with similar events elsewhere in the state, was also seen as bringing energy to promote locally rooted projects to help address climate change while boosting local economies.

“Action at the local level is what is going to solve the climate-change crisis and provide a model for the state and national level, and even for the international level,” said Carol Oldham, executive director of the Massachusetts Climate Action Network, which is part

of the nearly 200-group coalition Mass Power Forward coordinating the statewide grass-roots effort. “With the fears of what’s happening at the federal level and all of the things that we’re seeing there, it feels like the local level ... is even more important now.”

Working with groups like Greening Greenfield, Mass Power Forward provided a checklist that communities can use to pass nonbinding town or city resolutions — like one recently passed in Salem and one that activists hope to introduce in Northampton — to set all-renewable energy goals and to call for a similar statewide resolution by the Legislature.

The Salem resolution, for example, calls on the city to “move forward with projects to reduce fossil-fuel use and expand clean energy, including installing solar panels on all feasible municipal rooftop properties, and pursuing other renewable energy generation such as wind, geothermal, biomass and hydropower.” It also calls for city staff to “review all municipal decisions and consider whether those choices will bring the historic city and its residents, businesses and institutions closer to 100 percent renewable energy.”

The coalition’s handbook also spells out the steps for moving real clean-energy projects forward at the local level as well as a checklist for reviewing what steps a community has taken toward energy efficiency, renewable energy projects, transportation management and other areas. It also examines the kinds of policy that can be set at the local level to move toward total green-energy futures.

The effort is meant to “give local groups and local activists the tools to do the clean energy that’s going to get you to that 100 percent,” Oldham said.

Nancy Hazard of Greening Greenfield, called the Mass Power Forward checklist “a road map to a vibrant economy and a healthy planet,” pointing out that an energy audit in 2008 found Greenfield spending \$86 million, \$67 million of which left the county. Since then, as a Massachusetts Green Community, the town has installed intensive efficiency measures on municipal buildings and replacing windows, boilers and other systems, and installing 2 megawatts of solar power at the transfer station site and a new 1.8 megawatt solar farm at the Millbrook Well. Because of these steps, the town has already met its Green Communities Act goal of reducing municipal energy use by 20 percent.

“That helps in our quest to being totally renewable,” said Greenfield Mayor William Martin. “It also helps in the global effort to do something important .... But it also does something else: It takes all our expense in the budget and moves that utility expense

within the budget to a couple other departments. The more we can save of people's pocketbook money, the more they can spend locally."

Asked afterward whether Greenfield was among the communities that are considering a resolution to move toward 100 percent renewables, Hazard said, "not at the moment."

Martin added that he would: "have a real problem with supporting 100 percent," adding, "the resolution proposed should not restrict the flexibility of government. ... It's the constrictor of options."

Another piece of the Mass Power Forward effort aims to push legislation, including establishing a "green bank" to help people pay for renewable projects, to divest state pension money from fossil fuels and to increase the "net metering" cap on solar projects.

"In recognition of what's going on at the federal government, I think what we're doing today, launching this program throughout the state, becomes even more important, because of in spite of federal policy, wherever it may end up, it's important at the state and at the local level that we continue to work and lead, and set an example here in Massachusetts for the rest of the country," Rep. Paul Mark, D-Peru, said. "Local action complements state action. Local action makes state action more important. As we watch towns like Greenfield taking this lead, it inspires people like me and my colleagues, and other cities and towns around the state, that we can do the same thing."

Other Franklin towns can get a boost in moving toward the renewable energy goals with the help of workshops being organized to begin next month by Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution, said that group's representative, Robert Armstrong Conway. Those workshops are planned for Greenfield, Leverett, as well as the Shelburne Falls, Orange-Athol and South County areas.

Adele Franks of Climate Action said that while many Pioneer Valley communities, like her own city of Northampton, have already "jumped on the train" with renewable energy projects, "there's so much further to go."